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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [ET](#)  
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: (C-AL7-01035) ACTIONS AGREED ON OGADEN  
SITUATION

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 2439 (AND PREVIOUS)  
[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 2413  
[1](#)C. ADDIS ABABA 2196  
[1](#)D. STATE 83346 (NOTAL)

Classified By: ERIC WONG, ACTING DCM. REASON: 1.4 (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Ambassador convened a meeting on August 3 to address current developments in the Ogaden area of Ethiopia's Somali Region, and possible responses by international partners. UN officials, NGO representatives, and key donor missions reviewed the humanitarian and security situation in the Ogaden, and agreed on a common approach emphasizing:  
-- Urging the GOE to lift restrictions on commercial food;  
-- Pushing for increased humanitarian aid and access to the Ogaden;  
-- Using the GOE's acceptance of health NGOs to expand humanitarian access to the Ogaden;  
-- Urging the GOE to exercise greater transparency;  
-- Refraining from issuing public statements, but exercising discrete diplomatic pressure instead on the GOE.  
Donors and UN agencies concur that discrete diplomatic pressure will be more effective than public outcry; ICRC's Country Director also underscored that ICRC preferred that international partners not/not engage the GOE on its behalf to protest its recent expulsion from the Ogaden.

[1](#)2. (SBU) UN officials and NGO representatives reported that military restrictions continued to prevent commercial food from reaching the Ogaden, and that local officials justified the restrictions as a ban on "contraband" aiding the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) rebels. WFP reports that emergency food relief is expected to be delivered soon to Warder Zone--but only to two non-Ogadeni areas outside the area of ongoing counterinsurgency operations. In contrast to the military and security services who downplay the existence of any humanitarian crisis, local health officials invite NGOs to come to the Ogaden to assist in addressing malnutrition and acute watery diarrhea (AWD/cholera). UNOCHA reported incidents of alleged forced displacement of villagers; Canada has received secondhand information of alleged torture and beatings (including use of electric shocks) of detainees; and MSF asserts it can confirm the burning of 5 villages in Warder.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Ambassador raised these concerns in a subsequent private meeting with the Prime Minister's National Security

Advisor Abay Tsehaye, who agreed to discuss loosening restrictions on commercial food with other GOE principals. Abay noted that any investigation of alleged human rights abuses should examine both the ONLF and the Ethiopian military; Abay said he would arrange a visit to the Ogaden in September for NGOs, foreign diplomats, and the media. END SUMMARY.

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MILITARY STILL BANS COMMERCIAL TRAFFIC TO OGADEN  
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14. (SBU) UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) Head of Office and Deputy to the Humanitarian Coordinator Paul Hebert reiterated highlights from his August 2 briefing to UN humanitarian agencies, NGOs, and donor partners (ref A). Consultations the previous week, with the Somali Region's president and heads of regional government bureaus, showed that the GOE was maintaining a "hard-line" position and did not appear willing to back down. GOE officials defended the continued ban on commercial trucks delivering food to the Ogaden by asserting that they were implementing an embargo of "contraband." Conditions were deteriorating: little food remained in markets, and what did remain was high-priced. Some food had reached major towns, but it was not being allowed out to rural areas). Hebert suggested that Gode (in the Ogaden) and Jijiga (which received traffic from Hargeisa) be used as possible gateways for providing food to the Ogaden. (NOTE: UN agencies present in the Somali Region are based in Gode and Jijiga. END NOTE.)

15. (SBU) The Somali Region President, as well as the head of the security/justice bureau, had maintained that they there

were no restrictions on humanitarian access to the Somali Region by the UN, but UNOCHA understood that the GOE was establishing a list of NGOs "working against the government," which included the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), recently expelled from the Somali Region. Medecins Sans Frontieres-Holland (MSF, or Doctors Without Borders) reported that it had seen no vehicles on the road at all, when traveling south from Aware Woreda (Degehabur Zone) to Warder; in contrast, there was activity in the Darod/Majerteen (i.e., non-Ogadeni) areas east of Warder Woreda. Similarly, MSF-Belgium had seen no vehicular traffic two weeks earlier while traveling through the Ogaden.

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EMERGENCY FOOD RELIEF ALLOWED--FOR NON-OGADENI POPULATION  
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16. (SBU) World Food Program (WFP) Program Unit Head Sonali Wickrema announced that emergency food relief would be delivered to two woredas within Warder Zone, but that noted that the two woredas (Geladin and Boh, bordering Somalia) were ethnic Darod/Majerteen areas (not ethnic Ogadeni areas), as well as outside the area of current military operations. Distribution would be at community-level distribution points, observed by WFP monitors (European and Somali nationals). The federal-level Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA) was reportedly planning future deliveries to Gode, Korahe, and Degehabur Zones (i.e., 3 of the 5 zones where military operations are ongoing). As coordinating delivery to the two local woredas in Warder required at least one week, coordinating future deliveries would likely require additional time.

17. (SBU) The current provision of emergency food was only a short-term fix and would be "inadequate," Wickrema said, as it would only total 4,000 metric tons (once completed), while the 1.5 million population in the affected area required 30,000 metric tons per month. WFP was therefore pushing the DPPA to provide a 2-3 month ration instead. Ultimately, however, the resumption of commercial food deliveries was key, she said.

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¶8. (SBU) Save the Children-UK Operations Manager Philip Upson said that he hoped the DPPA would release the full results of a recent assessment that showed a "serious deficit" in food security, and which highlighted that food aid alone would not/not be sufficient. In June, total cash income was already below the "livelihood protection threshold". By July, income had fallen below the "survival threshold" and was approaching a "worst-case scenario"--where individuals were surviving on milk and the meat of their livestock (which required sacrificing one-fourth of their herds per month), and thus not meeting basic nutritional needs. With the exception of parts of Fik and Degehabur Zones, the DPPA had conducted the "Gu" (rainy season) assessment in areas largely outside the Ogaden: Liben, Afder, and Shinile Zones; as well as areas near the border with Somalia and Somaliland, where commercial trade continued and prices of some goods had actually fallen. In areas where commercial traffic was restricted, however (including Gode), prices had risen significantly since May; e.g., in Kebridehar (Korahe Zone), the price of sorghum had doubled (from 80 to 195 birr), while the price of sugar had risen nearly 40 percent (from 283 to 390 birr). (NOTE: For additional details on the assessment, see REF B. END NOTE.)

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LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIALS REQUEST NGO HELP  
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¶9. (SBU) Publicly, GOE officials denied any crisis, but privately, local officials said otherwise. In contrast to security officials, Somali Region health bureau officials appealed for assistance from NGOs, Hebert said, and were openly concerned about malnutrition and the outbreak of AWD/cholera, specifically in 5 woredas: Segeg, Gerbo, and Dihun (Fik Zone); Degehamedo (Degehabur Zone); and Denan

(Gode Zone). Spanish Ambassador reported that MSF-Greece sought to enter the Ogaden to address health issues. MSF-Belgium, which was trying to establish a project in Fik, noted that the lack of a concentrated population in the Ogaden made AWD there less of a concern, as opposed to more heavily populated towns. MSF-Holland representative Eileen Skinnider said MSF-Holland continued to provide medical services through local staff from its compound in Warder, although international staff had departed voluntarily on July 23, following an attack on Warder town (by the ONLF). Skinnider said that MSF-Holland had been providing services from mobile clinics, as many Ogadeni residents who had fled to "the bush" feared coming into towns, due to the "heavy military presence."

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ALLEGED KILLINGS, BURNING OF VILLAGES  
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¶10. (SBU) Following attacks by the ONLF, the Ethiopian military had a typical response, UNOCHA's Hebert said. The ENDF would cordon off a 30km radius; visit villages within that radius; and then harass or kill villagers, or burn the villages, within that radius. Hebert said that village elders in 4 zones had provided detailed information (i.e., dates, names, and ages of alleged victims) of extrajudicial killings, and had also reported the burning of villages by the military. He said UNOCHA had received a report on August 1 that the ENDF military commander in Kebridehar (Korahe Zone) had advised pastoralist villagers to move into 4 designated villages, and that all other villages were declared "off-limits." There was "anecdotal information" of other population movements "into the bush."

¶11. (SBU) Canadian poloff Amy Galligan said Canada had received "credible second-hand information" reporting torture and beatings, including use of electric shocks, of detainees being held by authorities in Jijiga. MSF-Belgium representative Bruce de leVigne said that MSF had received

the same information.

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FORCED DISPLACEMENT REPORTED AROUND WARDER  
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¶12. (SBU) MSF-Holland's Skinnider said MSF-Holland could confirm 5 villages burnt in Warder Woreda (Warder Zone), including "partially burnt" Caado (pronounced "Add Oh")--northwest of Warder town. MSF-Holland had also seen numerous "empty villages" in Warder, devoid of all residents except a few who returned intermittently to use water sources. According to Skinnider, villagers from major trade centers near Warder town had been told to empty their villages and to move to Yuoub and Wafdug (southwest of Warder town) and to Walwal (immediately northeast of Warder town)--or else their villages would be burnt down. People had been moved in commercial trucks "commandeered" by the ENDF, she said.

¶13. (C) Skinnider reported separately to Emboffs that the military had transported villagers via 10 trucks northward from Lahelow to Wafdug, on June 9. Lahelow (near the border of Warder and Korahe Zones) was thus empty, but not burnt. Noting that even the secondary school principal in Yuoub was carrying a weapon, she reported that Somali Region civil servants (at least in Warder) had been directed to take up arms (presumably against the ONLF).

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AT ETHIOPIA'S REQUEST, ICRC HAS LEFT SOMALI REGION  
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¶14. (SBU) Asked whether ICRC could provide additional information on human rights, ICRC Head of Delegation Juan Pedro Schaerer replied that ICRC had not had teams in the field since July. Moreover, at the GOE's request, the ICRC had withdrawn from the Somali Region on July 29: ICRC had closed its offices in Gode and Jijiga, withdrawn its international staff, and terminated contracts with local staff. ICRC had sought to engage the ENDF in dialogue, as few organizations were available to engage the military on

international humanitarian law and violations of human rights. ICRC had been present in the Somali Region for 20 years, but had only systematically reviewed military operations in the Ogaden for the last 2-3 years. Given the current allegations against the ICRC (the MFA publicly accused the ICRC of collaborating with the ONLF), it would be difficult for the ICRC to return to the Somali Region.

¶15. (SBU) Schaerer said the ICRC had been denied access to military camps in May 2007, following its submission of a report on "problems in the Ogaden" to the ENDF. Schaerer noted that federal GOE officials had expressed surprise at the recent international concern about the Ogaden, as "it is not something new." Similar "consequences for the population" had occurred during the 2006 counterinsurgency in the Ogaden, but had drawn little interest from the international community.

¶16. (SBU) ICRC Head of Delegation Schaerer explicitly stated that the international community (U.S, UK, Canada, etc.) should not/not raise concerns about ICRC's expulsion from the Ogaden with the GOE, fearing it would be more counterproductive than helpful. Schaerer agreed to inform ICRC Headquarters of his concern.

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DONORS AGREE: PRIVATE PRESSURE, NO PUBLIC STATEMENTS  
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¶17. (SBU) Donor representatives generally agreed with Portuguese Ambassador's assessment that "low-key" diplomatic pressure would be more effective than public statements, as working with the GOE was essential. EU Heads of Mission had agreed not to issue any public statements on the Ogaden.  
-- UK DCM John Marshall highlighted the importance of

obtaining firsthand information on conditions in the Ogaden, in order to raise them with the GOE and ENDF, but also acknowledged that the GOE had legitimate security concerns. The Ethiopian military had denied reports of burnt villages and rapes; the focus of UK interventions with the GOE had been on restoring commercial traffic. In response, the GOE had asserted it was only removing vehicles that had been providing payments to the ONLF. Noting the GOE's tendency to deny allegations, and the GOE's expulsion of the ICRC from the Somali Region, Marshall cautioned against the risk of further GOE action against other humanitarian agencies and NGOs operating in the Ogaden.

-- Italian Ambassador said counterinsurgency tactics risked building support for guerrilla movements, and noted that Ethiopia had faced "similar situations" in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The current situation in the Ogaden had generated some attention in Italian media.

-- Canadian poloff noted that the same Ethiopia "elders" who had mediated the recent release and pardon of detained opposition leaders held since November 2005, now sought to help address the situation in the Ogaden.

-- USAID Mission Director noted that the USG was providing USD 9.2 million in assistance specifically for the Somali Region.

-- MFS-Holland suggested that the international community accept the GOE's offer to visit the Ogaden, as outlined in a recent MFA statement.

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GOE NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR  
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¶18. (S/NF) Ambassador subsequently met privately with Abay Tsehaye, National Security Advisor to Prime Minister Meles,

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and raised the concerns outlined above on lifting restrictions on commercial food, investigating alleged human rights abuses, and expanding access to the Ogaden for healthcare. Ambassador informed Abay that donors had agreed not to issue any public statements, as information on the situation was still developing. Abay agreed to raise the prospect of allowing commercial shipments from elsewhere in Ethiopia (rather than from Somalia) into the Ogaden, with Foreign Minister Seyoum. Ambassador said he would discuss increasing humanitarian food relief with USAID and WFP.

¶19. (S/NF) Pressed on the need for transparency, Abay said

the GOE was holding meetings to brief embassies and NGOs. On human rights, Abay agreed that there should be a dual investigation of allegations against both the ENDF and the ONLF. Abay further stated that in September he would arrange a visit to the Ogaden for NGOs, foreign embassies, and the media; even New York Times correspondent Jeffrey Gettleman (who had been detained by the ENDF in the Ogaden) was welcome to participate. Abay questioned the motivation for recent international interest in the Ogaden, and appealed for close cooperation with donors.

¶20. (C) COMMENT. Despite the focus of UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs on concluding "modalities" for the eventual delivery of emergency food relief to the Ogaden, there is widespread consensus among them that such relief would only serve as a short-term, stopgap solution, and that the lifting of restrictions on commercial food delivery is crucial. Others note the need for a comprehensive political solution, and the possible mediating role that Ethiopian elders (who have worked successfully with GOE principals and opponents on the recent release and pardon of detained opposition leaders) could play. The GOE's apparent acceptance of health NGOs to work on AWD/cholera and malnutrition is seen by many as a potential entry point for expanding humanitarian access to the Ogaden (ref A); National Security Advisor Abay Tsehaye's intention to arrange a visit to the Ogaden for diplomats and the media is also a positive step. Donors, and the ICRC Head of Delegation in Addis Ababa, agree that discreet diplomatic pressure will be far more productive than issuing critical

public statements now, based on limited information. END  
COMMENT.  
YAMAMOTO